

Testimony on 5322

Raised Bill No. 5322: AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A HUMAN SERVICES PERMIT AND A REQUIREMENT THAT SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS CONDUCT HOME VISITS DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR

Education Committee:

Submitted By: Kathryn Noonan, LCSW

My name is Kathryn Noonan and I am the sole school social worker at West Vine Street Elementary School in Stonington. I am in complete disagreement with everything in this bill for a variety of reasons.

The message that I would like to get across to the Education Committee regarding the first part of this bill is that mental health is equally as important as physical health. So, why lessen the requirements/criteria for holding such a position? Will MDs and surgeons no longer need to complete several years of education and training/residency as well? Would you feel comfortable having surgery performed by someone who only has a baccalaureate degree? Never mind the fact that a baccalaureate degree often is comprised of 2 years of general education studies and then only 2 years of study in the area of specialty. It would be incredibly HARMFUL to require less education/training for positions that are handling the most fragile populations. Personally, I know that my level of knowledge and competence in all aspects of social work increased tenfold following the completion of my master's degree and in the years leading up to obtaining my clinical license. I would not be able to perform and fulfill all of my obligations as a school social worker with the level of confidence and integrity that I currently possess if my education and training ended with my BSW.

As for the second part of this bill, it is completely unrealistic to require 2 home visits per student per year with the current ratio of social workers to students. Being the only social worker in my school makes that ratio 1:400. The recommended social worker to student ratio is 1:250. My ratio is actually the lowest out of other social workers in my area. A local high school has a ratio of 1:950. The high school in my district does not even have a social worker! How is it possible for one person to fulfill all of their duties as a school social worker AND go to each student's house TWICE whether they need it or not?? While I am aware that not all students require mental health support/services, the number of students (and their families) that do need our services is extremely high and continuing to increase. My building alone has over 30% of students that access mental health services on at least a weekly basis. We, as social workers, are fully capable of determining whether or not a home visit is warranted. Requiring school social workers to perform 2 home visits per year per student is not only unethical, it's insulting to us as skilled professionals.

There are many ways to improve the delivery and fidelity of mental health services in schools and the two items in this bill are certainly not it. How about the GA asks school social workers what we need and then actually listens?

Thank you for your time,
Kathryn Noonan, LCSW